<h1 style="text-align:center">Professional Fears of Truthfulness and Accountability</h1>

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As I sat at my second AFA Annual Meeting listening to a charge from one of the keynote speakers about addressing the challenges facing the fraternal community at large, I slowly glanced around and thought, "Am I the only one who thinks this is an empty charge?" It was passionate and enlightening in its own ways, but I wondered how long this conversation had been happening. It may seem obvious, but I was so enthralled with fraternity and sorority life at my first annual meeting that I was hesitant to be critical. I have now attended six annual meetings and have this same reaction each year – searching for acknowledgement that not much has changed.

The topics we discuss are not new. I have learned they are generally the same from campus to campus; and, beyond that, they repeat themselves year after year. We sometimes bask in the relief our students feel when they meet other undergraduates and realize *everyone has the same issues.* I no longer find this comforting.

My hesitations and resistance to critique our profession have dissipated. I do this because I care immensely about the fraternal movement. I believe in the movement, and I firmly believe we have the tools we need to create change. I also believe, however, we are fearful to confront the truth.

I have observed a posturing in our profession that attempts to cover up our insecurities and fearfulness about being honest about what's really going on.

My question is *why*? Why are we so scared? We seem to live in fear of having the *real* conversations. Not the prevention chats and educational trainings, but the nitty-gritty dialogue about why we have the issues we do and how we got here. When this fear wins, we undermine ourselves. We neglect to nurture our own progress. We *assume* something bad is going to happen and equip ourselves for *when* it does, rather than preparing for *if* it will.

Uncover the Mirror

It is the role of professionals to model the way. I reflect constantly on how I can be better and ensure I demonstrate high standards for my students, since that is what I expect of them. This is challenging – no one is perfect. My conflict with this philosophy is seeing professionals who think they are exempt from acting in accordance with the expectations they have of others because somehow they have earned their way into a club granting permission to act however they want. At meetings, conferences, and on social media, I have witnessed an obvious incongruence between actions and expressed values, which is exactly what we advise against.

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It is the role of our professional peers to hold us accountable when we are not maintaining the standards of our field. If we're being truthful, we know there are professionals out there who are not doing their jobs well. Instead of talking about them or their campuses or organizations behind closed doors, why not call them to the table and hold them accountable? This is not about shaming, embarrassing, or demonstrating a lack of deference or respect. It is about investing in others to make improvements for *the greater good*. How can we expect this of our students and members, if we're not willing to do it ourselves?

Moving Target

When we defend our communities because we feel targeted, we create divisiveness. We say to others, it's not the culture, it's that campus or that organization. The negative things you see are an anomaly, isolated to that one place.

We are fearful of true accountability and of standing up to someone *regardless* of their status. We have become loyal to traditions rather than to our purpose. In part, leaders of our organizations and within our field have come to conflate respect with a lack of critical feedback. To refute that politics play a role in the existence of fraternity and sorority life is naïve. We hesitate to challenge groups who have wealthy alumni giving back to our universities or organizations because we are more concerned about losing someone's investment than being imprisoned by a philosophy that will lead to our irrelevancy.

I am calling on my interfraternal brothers and sisters who have been around the longest, whose decision-making power defers to those with status, where the overt exclusion of "other" started, and likely, where many of our bad behaviors were born. Make no mistake, all groups have contributed to many of our poor practices – that is how some survive – but, until we can find a way to call everyone *in* together, the conversation leads to finger-pointing, distinction between who's done what, and ways to cover up our wounds.

History Matters

We are obligated to examine the role privilege plays in this system. How are we perpetuating or enabling racism, heteronormativity, misogyny, Christian privilege, and able-bodied privilege? What can we do better? We have access. We have power. How are we using those? We have lost sight of our purpose. We praise our founders and try to exude what they embodied without regard for the fact that they were imperfect, and the historical context of the time, place, and purpose for which our organizations were founded. Let's honor our history and our imperfections and figure out what 21st century fraternity and sorority looks like.

NIC and NPC organizations largely tokenize their "diverse" members and do not allow for authentic self-expression, which causes some to code switch or continues the marginalization of identities. It is a relative statement when people say these groups are more diverse than they have ever been, given that some organizations still have exclusionary practices, if not policies, preventing a true diversification of the organization. If we are being truthful, even when "open membership" policies are passed, little education is provided, which creates an obstacle to a real sense of inclusive membership.

Uncomfortable Reality

I recognize there are many generalizations here, and they are not meant as personal attacks. We have many people in our world doing good and hard work to further the movement. But, we need to confront our reality and stop putting Band-Aids on the symptoms, so we can start getting to the root of our problems. Our issues continue to persist without us getting to the root causes while the "good work" is being done.

Are we the only groups on campus who experience hazing? No.

Are our students the only ones who binge drink or use substances? No.

Are there other pockets of campus that persist in racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and ableism? Of course.

But, are we using our powers for good? Not always.

Philanthropy dollars, community service hours, and National Hazing Prevention Week programs are not an even exchange for a life. These deaths do not just happen. We are responsible. I feel as responsible for the deaths that occur on campuses each year as the people who were there.

I can shake my finger at them and pat myself on the back for having survived another semester without a student death, but the reality is, I contribute to this system. Evading close calls with death, injury from over-intoxication, or sexual assault allegations are not successes. Until we start getting real with ourselves, we are merely going to maintain the status quo playing whack-a-mole from campus to campus.

Low Standards Beget Low Performance

We often single out others who promote the behaviors we try to prevent (i.e. promotion of hazing activities in the military or professional athletics). Until we can develop effective and sustainable solutions in our own fraternal communities we must stop engaging in the judgment of others who persist in similar behaviors. Does the promotion of hazing and binge-drinking in

the media make our jobs harder? Sure it does, but we can't place the blame on other entities when we are not owning our stuff.

Jaime Escalante, a highly regarded educator known for his work in low-income Los Angeles high schools, once proffered, "Students [people] rise to the level of expectation [set for them]." There have been many approaches to meet students where they are, but lowering the bar is not the answer. There is a way to be realistic about what is happening on our campuses while maintaining high standards. When you set the bar high, communicate the expectations, and support the effort it takes to get there, they *will* get there….and so will we.

We Can Do This
Our community is deteriorating into blame rhetoric, crisis management, and aversion of accountability. We know students desire to belong, so when we promote practices that encourage masking and façade building, we diminish the potential of our community and promote inauthenticity.

This is not an indictment on individual groups or campus communities – we are thriving in many places. This is an appeal for the creation of a true coalition, whose mission is to break down the walls we hide behind and show others we are relevant. I beg us to call each other and our partners in and share seats around the table in order to redefine this thing called fraternity and sorority so it promotes authenticity, vulnerability, resilience, and critical thinking.

I am told there have been professionals in the past who have attempted similar pleas. I hope I am the last. I look to the collective "we" – staff, volunteers, alumni, collegiate members, campus-based, and headquarters alike – to work together to prevent the cycle from continuing. There is nothing more redundant, or more disheartening, than the persistent call for our extinction. Truthfulness and accountability are vital to renewing the system, which is needed now more than ever.